

# Question: "What is hyssop? What was hyssop used for in the Bible?"

(Quoted from: <https://www.gotquestions.org/hyssop-Bible.html>)

Answer: Since people in the biblical era did not have access to the products we do today, they often relied on naturally occurring resources such as plants, animal byproducts, and minerals for cleaning, cooking, food, medicine, and more. Hyssop, an herb in the mint family with cleansing, medicinal, and flavoring properties, was prolific in the Middle East and was used in a variety of ways.

The Bible mentions hyssop several times, mostly in the Old Testament. In Leviticus, God commanded His people to use hyssop in the ceremonial cleansing of people and houses. In one example, God tells the priests to use hyssop together with cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and the blood of a clean bird to sprinkle a person recently healed from a skin disease (likely leprosy). This act would ceremonially cleanse the formerly diseased person and allow him to reenter the camp (Leviticus 14:1-7). The same method was used to purify a house that had previously contained mold (Leviticus 14:33-53).

# Purge Me With Hyssop

(Quoted from: <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/ARTB/k/1212/Purge-Me-With-Hyssop.htm>)

Many years ago during my college days, I experienced a magnificent six-week career as a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman. It was a miserable but educational experience. The brand of vacuum I sold, Rainbow, may be familiar to some. Until recently, the Rainbow was unique among vacuum cleaners in that it uses water as its basis of filtration. All vacuums function on the principle of pulling air in at high velocity into some kind of filtering system, by which the dirt and dust particles become trapped and cleaner air is returned to the room.

Nearly a century of research has produced a number of different types of filtration systems for vacuum cleaners, some much better than others. However, even with the improvements and advances in the filtration systems on the market today, water-based filtration remains one of the very best and most efficient systems in use. Water will trap and retain between 90-99% of dirt and dust particles.

The motto used in the Rainbow marketing was "Wet dust don't fly." It is an accurate concept. Among the hundreds of cleaning solutions available in the marketplace, water continues to be the base for most of them, and water alone is still considered the best general agent for cleaning almost anything.

## **"The Washing of Water"**

The Bible refers frequently to using water for cleaning and purification, with both physical and spiritually symbolic implications. In the Old Testament, God gave the Levitical priesthood specific washing instructions in the performance of their duties. Individuals who were physically or ceremonially unclean were separated from the camp of Israel and were required to wash themselves with water before returning to the congregation. The religious Jews of Christ's time had devised intricate washing ceremonies to demonstrate their inner and outer purity. The rite of water baptism, of course, contains elements of washing symbolic of our spiritual cleansing.

Perhaps Jesus Christ performed the most significant use of water as a means of cleansing when He instituted the footwashing ceremony at His last Passover, just before His death and resurrection (John 13:1-17). Before this occasion, the Pharisees, horrified that His disciples did not follow the ceremonial washing rituals of the religious Jews before they ate, had confronted Him because of this (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23). Jesus denounced these rituals as vain and hypocritical, as they did nothing to cleanse the inner man.

Even though both rituals used water and were intended as symbols of inner cleanliness, Jesus' institution and performance of the Passover footwashing service was in direct contradiction to the washing ceremonies of the Pharisees. The Pharisaic ceremonial washings with water were merely public showmanship that contributed to the vanity and false esteem of those washing themselves. By contrast, Jesus relinquished any prerogatives or semblance of rank or esteem by kneeling before common men, and using a basin of water, He washed their feet, not His own. His purpose was to make His disciples clean, not to perform a show of His own cleanness.

Of the amazed disciples, Peter expressed dismay at the notion of having his feet washed by his Master. He wanted no part in a ritual that appeared to diminish his Lord in his eyes. But when Christ explained that if He did not wash his feet, he could not remain with Him, Peter demanded to be washed all over, not just his feet. Christ calmly informed him that washing his feet was sufficient for him to be "completely clean."

Shortly thereafter, Jesus commanded them, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14), implementing this as a permanent Christian service. Obviously, an annual footwashing does not replace a daily bath or shower—our daily hygiene is a personal responsibility—but what Jesus established at this Passover footwashing is the basis for our spiritual cleansing. It is only His washing of us that makes us spiritually clean and acceptable before God!

Some centuries before this Passover evening, the Israelite king, David, understood this. He writes in Psalm 51:1-2:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

In the depths of his godly sorrow over his sins, David understood that it was the washing of His Creator that was needed for him to be cleansed of his transgressions of God's way of life.

In the book of Psalms, David expresses profound details of his relationship with his Creator. He looked forward to his Savior coming to fulfill the purposes of cleansing and restoration. David understood that His God was working to open the gates to everlasting life for human beings who would be cleansed and made whole, perfected as children of the great God.

Recall in Psalm 23 that David concludes his description of his relationship with his Shepherd, his Creator, by declaring that he would "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). David looked forward to eternal life, understanding that it would take God washing him and cleansing him of his sins to allow him to come into this inheritance.

## **"Whiter Than Snow"**

Woven into the fabric of the Psalms are many of the very words that Jesus Christ used Himself during His life on earth, including some of the final words He uttered before His death. The understanding that David possessed, a gift and blessing that the Eternal gave to him, is further evidenced in Psalm 51:7: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Here, David again refers to the spiritual washing required for his cleansing. He makes a deliberate request of God to wash Him, knowing that only the cleansing power of Almighty God can make a man clean and pure. Though his sins have covered him in filth and stained him to the very roots of his being, the washing power of God makes a man whiter than snow.

In our understanding of the symbolism of colors, "snow-white" is considered the ultimate in white, the whitest of white, as pure and unsullied a white as possible. David's expectation was that God's cleansing power would exceed even that ultimate white—"I shall be whiter than snow." We can only relate this to absolute spiritual, moral perfection, the very state in which Almighty God exists. The wording expresses that the scrubbing God could give him would permit him to exist in that absolute, ultimate state of perfection.

At the beginning of verse 7, David makes the deliberate request of God to purge him with hyssop. Hyssop is an interesting choice as a cleansing agent. It is an herb, a species of marjoram and member of the mint family, and some Bible versions actually refer to it as "marjoram." It has long been considered an aromatic and medicinal herb, anciently indigenous to western Asia and northern Africa, including regions of the Middle East. The hyssop plant grows just under three feet in height, producing clusters of variously colored flowers. In ancient times, it grew naturally in rocky crevices, and people cultivated it on terraced walls.

The short, cut stems of the plant can be gathered into bunches, and in the Old Testament, these bunches were used for ritual purposes. The most spiritually significant of these uses is recorded in Exodus 12:22. Moses has just given the instructions for the killing of the Passover lamb, and he continues with some further instructions that must have been rather startling for those participating Israelites:

And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood [of the Passover lamb](#) that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.

It is important that we consider all the aspects of this event. During repeated requests by Moses for Pharaoh to allow Israel to leave Egypt, Pharaoh had continually refused to let God's people go, and the nation had endured nine plagues of cataclysmic consequences. The economy of the nation was largely in shambles. Crops were ruined, and disease had run rampant.

Since the third plague, God had also made readily visible a clear distinction between the captive nation of Israel and the Egyptians, in that the Israelites in Goshen had been spared much of the devastation that had ruined the rest of Egypt. By the use of the blood of the sacrificial lamb, God was about to make a final, absolute distinction between these two nations that would never be forgotten.

## Hyssop Dipped in Blood

We must recognize that Egypt suffered the devastation at the hand of God because though it was a sophisticated, dazzling, world-dominating empire, it was also a wicked, idolatrous nation. The Egyptians were a people who openly flouted the natural evidence of a supreme Creator by worshipping a pantheon of idols and gods dedicated to their own passions and lusts. Egyptians regularly engaged in a frenzy of immoral and idolatrous celebrations, sporting events, fashions, and music all dedicated to gods of materialism and human gratification.

The plagues God meted upon the land of Egypt and its people were just as much attacks on her idols and lifestyle as they were punishments for the sins of her people. As just one example, the Egyptians worshipped the Nile River as a god, and when God turned its waters to blood, the life-giving nature of the river was destroyed, along with the power that the Nile River god supposedly possessed.

Thus, in this solemn Passover event of Exodus 12, God used blood of a different nature to represent the saving, life-giving power that only He, the almighty, eternal God, possessed. The sacrificial lamb of Passover symbolized the future Son of God, who would take upon Himself the role of the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29). The shed blood of the Passover lamb symbolized the blood to be shed by the coming Messiah.

The bunch of hyssop was dipped into the blood, and per God's instructions, that blood was sprinkled or brushed on the doorposts and lintel of each home. The Israelites were then told to stay within those homes, separated from the Egyptian people and their normal routines. That night, there was to be no interaction or communication with any aspect of the Egyptian civilization. Their very lives depended on their following this command to the letter.

Exodus 12:23-27 tells us why:

For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" that you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households." So the people bowed their heads and worshipped.

The sacrificial blood, sprinkled or smeared by the bunch of hyssop, graphically represented a separation and a protection of Israel against the deadly havoc that God wrought upon Egypt that night. The blood ceremonially cleansed and protected the people inside those homes against the plague of death that struck a people who practiced the filthy abominations of godlessness.

Later, in the books of Leviticus and Numbers, hyssop was used as part of sacrificial ceremonies. The hyssop was always tied into bunches for use in sprinkling the blood of the sacrificed animal. In some sacrifices, the priest sprinkled the blood onto the person making the sacrifice.

In Numbers 19, Moses gives instructions for one who is unclean due to touching a dead body. These instructions include taking a bunch of hyssop, dipping it into clean, running water, and sprinkling the unclean individual, his tent, and possessions. This example clearly connects the use of hyssop and clean water for cleansing.

Over the years, some have suggested that hyssop contains valuable antiseptic or cleansing properties that would "disinfect" the contaminated person or his possessions. This cannot be the point because such an idea contradicts the fact that God is

the only Source of true purification. The biblical use of hyssop in the Passover, the sacrifices, and the ceremonial cleansing rituals was a constant reminder, painting a detailed picture of the washing, cleansing, saving, purification, and salvation from death itself that come only from the eternal God.

This is the kind of cleansing that David requested of God when he asked to be purged with hyssop.

## **"I Thirst!"**

There is a final use of hyssop in John 19:28-30:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

In the final moments of His physical life on earth, God orchestrated that Jesus Christ be given hyssop, an identifying element that

- » connected Him to the Passover lamb centuries before in Egypt;
- » associated Him with the sacrificial and cleansing ceremonies; and
- » recalled David's request to be purified of his sins.

Water is indeed the most wonderful physical means to clean and cleanse that God has created. Yet, it is through the life, the shed blood, the death, and the resurrected, eternal, glorious life of our God and Savior that we can experience the ultimate cleansing and purification, as typified in the use of hyssop in the pages of the Bible. Through this spiritual cleansing and purification, we can, like David, anticipate the end of our physical lives and hope to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.



# What is hyssop; what was hyssop used for in the Bible?

(Quoted from: <https://www.compellingtruth.org/hyssop-Bible.html>)

Hyssop is a small, bush-like plant in the mint family, with purple flowers growing on its long stems. Hyssop is used for cooking and for aromatic and medicinal purposes. The Bible mentions hyssop in religious ceremonies, and because of its ceremonial use, it is a symbol for cleansing. While hyssop is not as recognizable a symbol for purification, its use in the Mosaic law for cleansing and its connection to the cross becomes a powerful symbol of the new covenant.

The first appearance of hyssop in the Bible is in Exodus during the first Passover. The Israelites were preparing for the last plague that God would send upon Egypt, and Moses gave the Israelites instructions, saying "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning" (Exodus 12:21-22). The hyssop clearly served a practical purpose in helping to paint the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, but it also seems to mark the Israelites as "pure" and not recipients of the judgment God was bringing. The hyssop is used here along with a sacrifice of a lamb as protection for the Israelites that sets them apart from the Egyptians. This is the first Passover, and God commanded that it become an annual feast. Passover is still celebrated by Jews today. God designed the

Passover to be a way to remember what He had done for the Israelites and to foreshadow the Messiah. It is filled with images of Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah.

Hyssop is also mentioned in Leviticus 14:6 for sprinkling blood in the cleansing ceremony for a leper. It is used in Numbers 19:1-10 along with other ingredients to be thrown into the fire that is burning a heifer that has been sacrificed. The ashes were to be deposited in a clean place outside the camp and "kept for the water for impurity for the congregation of the people of Israel" (Numbers 19:9). Numbers 19:17-18 talks about adding fresh water to the ashes of the sin offering and using hyssop to sprinkle the water on the tent where a person has died and on all who have touched the dead person. We see, then, that hyssop is linked to ceremonial cleansing.

King David used hyssop as a symbol for spiritual purification in his psalm of repentance. He sings, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment....Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:4, 7). David realized that he needed to be cleansed of his uncleanness inside and out. He called upon God to cleanse his adulterous heart, using the ceremonially purifying hyssop as a metaphor for his inward cleansing.

The last place hyssop appears in the Bible is at the cross. After Jesus sustained beatings, humiliation, and pain beyond what we could image, Jesus said, "I thirst" (John 19:28). The Bible says that "A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:29-30). While Christ hung on the cross, laden with our sins because He loves us, He was given wine on the branch of hyssop. Much like the first Passover, when hyssop was used to spread the purifying blood of the lamb upon the Israelite's doorpost, hyssop is used here as Jesus bleeds out the blood that would pu-

rify and atone for our sins for eternity. Just as hyssop aided in spreading the blood of a sacrificial life to save the Israelites at the first Passover, hyssop aided in the shedding of Jesus' blood at the cross to save the world from their sins. This last use of hyssop at the cross eradicated the need for its ceremonial use of purification. Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross is the only purification we need to be right with God and live with Him for eternity. Hyssop was necessary in the Old Testament for purification, but Jesus' work on the cross has eliminated the need for ceremonial cleansing. His blood purifies all who believe in Him by faith once and for all, so that we no longer needed to be cleansed ceremonially (Hebrews 10:1-23).

Hebrews 9:12-15 explains, "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."